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The Umbrian and Roman School of Art

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RAPHAEL

The Umbrian School of Art originated in Umbria, a province on the Tiber, and was distinguished for the fervent religious feeling of its painters. It was in this province that St. Francis, of Assissi, the most famous saint of the middle ages, was born and lived, and it was owing to his presence and influence that the people were more deeply and strongly religious than those of the neighboring provinces. "Their painters," says a distinguished critic," strove above all things to express the mystic beauty of the Christian soul. Their art was the expression of the purest and holiest aspirations of Christian life." Nicolo Alunno, of Toligno - born in 1458, died in 1499 - is the first master in whom the distinct Umbrian characteristics became apparent. His works have a dreamy, religious feeling; are superior in purity and brightness of color, and have much natural beauty.

But Pietro Vannucci, called Il Perugino, from Perugia, where he principally worked, is beyond all others the representative master of the Umbrian School. He was born in Umbria in 1446, and, being poor, at nine years of age was articled to a painter in Perugia. He made great progress, and afterwards went to Florence and studied under Andrea Trochio, and became an intimate friend of his fellow pupil, Leonardo da Vinci, who exercised much influence over him. After acquiring considerable reputation in Florence he was called to Rome, where he executed some frescoes for the Sistine Chapel. The greater part of these were destroyed to make room for Michael Angelo's

Last Judgment, but in one that remains, The Delivery of the Keys to St. Peter, he shows the effect of the Florentine style upon him. But when Perugino returned to Perugia he fell back into his old Umbrian manner, only he added to the religious sentiment of that school a more perfect mode of execution, and a pure beauty of color such as no Italian painter had ever before attained. He was one of the earliest painters south of the Alps who adopted the Flemish method of oil painting, and his success in it was almost as great as that of his Flemish contemporaries. (The Flemish method consisted in mixing certain oils with the colors, that gave a degree of firmness to the work, which not only secured it against all injury from water, when once dried, but also imparted so much life to the colors that they exhibited a sufficient lustre in themselves, without the aid of varnish.) Perugino's school at Perugia was one of the most celebrated in Italy, numerous pupils being attracted to it to learn the secret of his rich oil coloring. None of his scholars, except perhaps, Raphael, attained anything like the purity of his coloring. Michael Angelo is said to have spoken of Perugino as "a dunce in art," for which expression Perugino summoned him before a magistrate, but of course got nothing but ridicule for his actions. Perugino, although so distinguished for the spirituality of his pictures, is represented as being himself a violent-tempered and unlovable man; thus presenting another instance of the incongruity which often exists between the character of an artist and the loveliness of his works. Among his finest pictures are the Certosa Madonna, an altar-piece, originally painted for the Certosa, or Carthusian Convent at Pavia, a work of great beauty and purity, and an Ascension of Christ, formerly an altar-piece in San Pietro Maggiore in Perugia. Unfortunately, Perugino

was avaricious, and was tempted to undertake numerous commissions, which he left to be executed by his pupils. Mrs. Jameson says of him: "He has produced some of the weakest as well as some of the most exquisite pictures in the world." But the fact is that many of the pictures bearing his name were produced in his workshop, and bear no impress of his mind and hand. Perugino died in 1524. Had he, indeed, painted no great pictures, he would still have won undying fame as the master of him who shone, the brightest star in all that brilliant galaxy of painters which distinguished the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries - the "divine" Raphael.

Raphael Sanzio, or Santi, was born at Urbino, on Good Friday, in the year 1483. His father, Giovanni Santi, was a painter of some reputation, and a respectable citizen of Urbino.

The mother of Raphael was named Magia, and is said to have been very lovely in person. The likeness between her and her son was very striking. She died when he was only eight years old; but his father's second wife, Bernardina, well supplied her place, and treated him with the greatest kindness. His father was his first teacher; but he soon showed such extraordinary talent that his father decided to place him under Perugino; but before his arrangements could be completed, he died. His wishes were carried out, however, by his widow and his first wife's brother, and Raphael was sent to Perugia, to study under Perugino, at the age of twelve years. He remained in this school until he was twenty, and was chiefly employed in assisting his teacher. A few pictures painted between his sixteenth and twentieth years are very interesting. There is, of course, the manner of his master, but mingled with some of those qualities which were peculiarly his own.

These pictures show in a remarkable manner the gradual improvement in his style, and his early indication towards his favorite subject, the Madonna and Child. The most celebrated of his pictures painted in the school of Perugino, is the Marriage of the Virgin - a subject which is very common in Italian art. This beautiful picture is in the Gallery at Milan. In the same year that he painted it, Raphael visited Florence for the first time, and saw some cartoons by Leonardo and Michael Angelo, which filled his mind with new and bold ideas of form and composition. He did not remain in Florence long on his visit.

In the following year he painted several large pictures for churches in Perugia, and when he had finished these and other works he returned to Florence, and remained there until 1508. Some of his most exquisite works were painted at this period of his life, that is, before he was twenty-five. One of these is the Madonna sitting under the palm tree while Joseph presents flowers to the Infant Christ, which is now in the Bridgewater Gallery. Another is the famous Madonna in the Florentine Gallery, called the Madonna del Cardellino (the Madonna of the Goldfinch), because the little St. John is presenting a goldfinch to the Infant Christ. Another, as famous, now in the Louvre, is called La Belle Jardiniere, because the Madonna is seated in a garden amid flowers, with Christ standing at her knee. There is the St. Catharine, in the National Gallery; the St. George, in the Louvre, and there are besides two large altar-pieces, and some beautiful portraits, in all about thirty pictures, painted during the three years he spent at Florence. In his twenty-fifth year, Raphael had already become celebrated throughout Italy. At this time Julius II was Pope, and was having the Palace of the Vatican greatly embellished. Bramante, the

greatest architect, and Michael Angelo, the greatest sculptor, in Italy were already in his employ, and he sent for Raphael to undertake the decoration of those halls in the Vatican which Pope Nicholas V and Sixtus IV had begun and left unfinished. On arriving at Rome, Raphael at once began the Camere or Chambers of the Vatican. "In general, when he undertook any great work illustrative of sacred or profane history, he did not hesitate to ask advice of his learned friends on points of custume or chronology, but when he began his paintings in the Vatican he waswholly unassisted, and the plan which he laid before the pope, which was immediately approved and adopted, shows that the grasp and cultivation of his mind equalled his powers as a painter." In the pictures in the first salon called the Camera della Segnatura, he represented Theology, Poetry, Philosophy, and Jurisprudence. On the ceiling he painted in four circles, four allegorical female figures, throned amid clouds, and attended by beautiful genii. Of these the figure of poetry is particularly grand. Beneath these figures,and on the four sides of the room, he painted four great pictures, each about fifteen feet high, by twenty or twenty-five feet.wide, the subjects illustrating the four allegorical figures above.

About this time Raphael painted the fine portrait of Julius II, which is in the Pitti Palace, at Florence; also the portrait of himself, which is in the Gallery of Painters, at Florence. It represents him as a very handsome young man, with luxuriant hair and dark eyes, full lips, and a pensive countenance, with an expression of sweet womanliness. He also painted the four Sybils in the Chapel of the Chigi family, in the church of Santa Maria della Pace, - "sublime figures, full of grandeur and inspiration, and on the wall of a chamber of the Chigi Palace, the Triumph of Galatea. About the year 1510 he began the

decoration of the second chamber of the Vatican. In this series of compositions he represented the power and glory of the Church, and her miraculous deliverance from her secular enemies. On the ceiling of this room are four beautiful pictures. The Promises of God to the four Patriarchs- Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Moses. On the four side walls the Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple at Jerusalem; the Miracle of Bolsena; Attila, King of the Huns, Terrified by the Apparition of St. Peter and St. Paul, and St. Peter Delivered from Prison. Before these pictures were finished, Julius II died, and was succeeded by Leo X, who was no less a patron of Raphael than his predecessor had been, and the number of learned and accomplished men whom he attached to his Court, and the enthusiasm for classical learning which prevailed among them, strongly influenced those productions of Raphael which date from his accession. They became more and more allied to the antique, and less and less embued with that pure religious spirit, which we find in his earlier works. His friends were cardinals and poets, and others of the most distinguished men of Rome. His riches increased, and he built himself a fine house; he had numerous scholars from all parts of Italy, who regarded him with the greatest reverence and love; and such was the influence of his genial temper that all these young men lived in the most entire union with him and with each other, and his school was never disturbed by those animosities and jealousies which were so prevalent in other schools of art in Italy. All the other painters of that time were the friends rather than the rivals of Raphael, with the single exception of Michael Angelo.

Under Leo X, Raphael began the third hall or camera, of the Vatican, in 1515. The ceiling of this chamber had been painted by Perugino, for Sixtus IV, and Raphael, from a feeling of respect for his old master, would not remove or paint over his work. On the sides of the room he represented the principal events of the lives of Pope Leo III and Pope Leo IV. Of these pictures the most remarkable is L'Incendio del Borgo (The Fire in the Borgo), representing a fire in Rome in the reign of Leo IV, said to have been extinguished by a miracle. This fresco, though remarkably fine in point of drawing, is said to be the worst of the whole scenes in color.

The last of the two chambers in the Vatican is the Hall of Constantine, painted with scenes from the life of that emperor. All the frescoes in this room were executed by the scholars of Raphael from his designs and cartoons.

While Raphael was engaged in painting the frescoes in the Vatican, he was also engaged in many other works. Among his most popular compositions are the scenes of subjects from the Old Testament, called Raphael's Bible. These are comparatively small pictures adorning the thirteen cupolas of the Loggie or open galleries, running around three sides of an open court of the Vatican. The gallery on the second story is the one painted under Raphael's direction. Among the greatest and most celebrated of his works are his cartoons, which originated in this manner: The interior of the Sistine Chapel had been ornamented around the lower walls with paintings in imitation of tapestries. Leo X resolved to substitute real draperies of the most costly material, and Raphael was employed to furnish the subjects and drawings, which were to be copied on the looms of Flanders, and worked in a mixture of silk, wool and gold. The cartoons were originally eleven in number, to fit

the ten compartments into which the wall was divided by pilasters, and the space over the altar. Four of the eleven are lost and seven remain, which are now in the gallery of Hampton Court Palace.

The intention in the whole series was to express "the mission, the sufferings, and the triumph of the Christian Church." The subjects were The Coronation of the Virgin; The Miraculous Draught of Fishes; The Charge to Peter; The Stoning of Stephen; The Healing of the Lame Man; The Death of Ananias; The Conversion of St. Paul; Elymas Struck Blind; Paul and Barnabas at Lystra; Paul Preaching at Athens; Paul in Prison. Those which are lost are the Coronation of the Virgin; The Stoning of Stephen; The Conversion of St. Paul, and St. Paul in Prison. These are the subjects of the famous cartoons of Raphael, of which Mrs. Jameson gives a deeply interesting and minutely detailed account in her "Early Italian Painters," which is far too long for insertion here, but which will richly repay a careful reading.

It is a matter of regret that these cartoons have never yet been adequately engraved. Raphael finished them in 1516. They are all from fourteen to eighteen feet in length, and about twelve feet high, the figures above life size; drawn with chalk, and colored in distemper. He received for his designs four hundred and thirty-four gold ducats - about three thousand, two hundred and fifty dollars. The rich tapestries worked from these cartoons, in silk, wool and gold, were completed at Arras, and sent to Rome in 1519. For these the pope paid the manufacturers fifty thousand gold ducats. Raphael had the satisfaction before he died, of seeing them hung in their places, and of witnessing the wonder and applause they excited through the whole city. But while all Rome was indulging in ecstasies over

them, the precious cartoons were lying in the warehouse of the weaver, at Arras, neglected and forgotten. Some of them were torn into fragments and parts of these exist in various collections. Seven still remained in some garret or cellar, when Rubens, just a century afterwards, discovered them, and mentioned their existence to Charles I, and advised him to purchase them for the use of a manufactory at Mortlake. The purchase was made. They had been cut into long strips, about two feet wide, for the convenience of the workmen, and in this state they arrived in England.

On the death of Charles I, Cromwell purchased them for three hundred dollars. They were nearly lost by being carried off to France in the reign of Charles II, but were finally rescued, and remained neglected in a lumber-room at Whitehall until the reign of William IV, during which time they narrowly escaped being destroyed by fire when Whitehall was burned in 1698. King William ordered them to be repaired, the fragments pasted together and stretched upon linen and being then occupied with the alterations and improvements of Hampton Court Palace, he ordered Sir Christopher Wren, the architect, to plan and erect a room expressly to receive them.

In the Vatican there is a second set of ten tapestries, for which Raphael gave the original designs, but he did not execute the cartoons, and the style of drawing in those fragments which remain is not his.

The fame of Raphael had by this time spread to other countries, and it is said that Henry VIII of England invited him to his court, and also Francis I of France, but neither of these monarchs could induce him to leave Italy. He painted for Francis a noble picture of St. Michael Overpowering the Evil One; also a very beautiful Holy Family, and a picture of St. Margaret Overcoming the Dragon, in

compliment to the king's sister, Margaret; and the king afterwards purchased his beautiful portrait of Joanna of Arragon, vice-queen of Naples. All these are in the Louvre.

We now come to the period of one of the greatest and most celebrated of Raphael's pictures - the Madonna di San Sisto, or Sistine Madonna. In saying that it is the loveliest picture in the world, I have the authority of some of the most eminent art critics. This wonderful picture was painted between the years 1517 and 1520, for the Convent of St. Sixtus in Piacenza. So familiar is it to everyone, that a description of it seems hardly necessary. It represents the Virgin, a noble figure, holding the Infant Christ in her arms, her head surrounded by throngs of heavenly cherubs. Kneeling before her on one side is St. Sixtus, on the other St. Barbara, and at her feet are two lovely cherubs who gaze up at her adoringly. One of the most distinguished and appreciative of art critics, Mrs. Jameson, has given, in her diary of an Ennuyé, a most exquisite description of this picture, and of her sensations on first beholding it, in the Dresden Gallery. She says: "On entering the gallery for the first time, I walked straight forward without pausing or turning to the right or left, into the Raphael room, and looked around for the Madonna del Sisto - literally with a kind of misgiving. Familiar as the form might be to the eye and the fancy, from numerous copies and prints, still the unknown original held a sanctuary in my imagination, like the mystic Isis behind her veil; and it seemed that whatever I beheld of lovely, or perfect, or soul-speaking in art, had an unrevealed rival in my imagination; something was beyond - there was a criterion of possible excellence as yet only conjectured - for I had not seen the Madonna del Sisto. Now, when I was about to lift my eyes to it, I literally hesitated - I drew a long

sigh as if resigning myself to disappointment, and looked. Yes! there she was, indeed! that divinest image that ever shaped itself in palpable hues and forms to the living eye! What a revelation of ineffable grace, and purity, and truth, and goodness! There is no use attempting to say anything about it; too much has already been said and written - and what are words?

"After gazing upon it again and again, day after day, I feel that to attempt to describe the impression is like measuring the infinite and sounding the unfathomable. When I looked up at it to-day it gave me the idea, or rather the feeling, of a vision descending and floating down upon me. The head of the Virgin is quite superhuman; to say that it is beautiful, gives no idea of it. Other virgins have more beauty, in the common meaning of the word; but every other female face, however lovely, however majestic, would, I am convinced, appear either trite or exaggerated if brought into immediate comparison with this divine countenance. There is such a blessed calm in every feature! And the eyes, beaming with a kind of internal light, look straight out of the picture - not at you or me, not at anything belonging to this world - but through and through the universe. The unearthly child is a sublime vision of power and grandeur, and seems not so much supported as enthroned in her arms; and what fitter shrine for the Divinity than a woman's bosom full of innocence and love? The expressive expression in the face of St. Barbara, who looks down, has been differently interpreted; to me she seems to be giving a last look at the earth, above which the group is raised as on a hovering cloud. St. Sixtus is evidently pleading in all the combined fervor of faith, hope, and charity, for the congregation of sinners, who are supposed to be kneeling before the picture- that is, for <u>us</u> - to whom he points.

Finally, the cherubs below, with their upward look of rapture and wonder, blending the most childish innocence with a sublime inspiration, complete the harmonious whole, uniting heaven with earth.

While I stood in contemplation of this all-perfect work, I felt the impression of its loveliness in my deepest heart, not only without the power, but without the thought or wish to give it voice in words till some lines of Shelley's - lines which were not, but, methinks, ought to have been, inspired by the Madonna, came, uncalled, floating through my memory -

"Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of woman,
All that is unsupportable in thee,
Of light, and love, and immortality!
Sweet benediction in the eternal curse!
Veil'd Glory of this lampless universe!
Thou Harmony of Nature's art!
I measure.
The world of fancies, seeking one like thee,
And find - alas! mine own infirmity!"

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Surely it seems that one who could so exquisitely paint in words might herself have been inspired to place upon canvas some imperishable work of art. It has been ascertained that Raphael occupied only three months in painting this Madonna. "It was thrown upon his canvas in a glow of inspiration, a creation rather than a picture." In the beginning of the last century, the elector of Saxony, Augustus III, purchased it for sixty thousand florins - about thirty thousand dollars - and it is now the chief attraction of the famous Dresden Gallery.

The last great picture of Raphael, which was not quite completed at his death, was the Transfiguration. This picture is divided into two parts. The lower part contains a crowd of figures, and is full of passion, energy and action. In the center is the demoniac boy, struggling in the arms of his father. Two women, kneeling, implore

assistance, others are seen crying aloud, and stretching out their arms for aid. The upper part of the picture represents Mt. Tabor. The three apostles lie prostrate, dazzled, on the earth; above them, transfigured in glory, floats the divine form of the Saviour, with Moses and Elias on either side. The lower part represents the calamities and miseries of human life, the rule of demoniac power, the weakness even of the faithful, when unassisted, and directs them to look on high for aid and strength in adversity. "Above, in the brightness of divine bliss, undisturbed by the sufferings of the lower world, we behold the source of our consolation, and of our redemption from evil."

At this time the lovers of painting in Rome were divided in opinion as to the relative merits of Michael Angelo and Raphael, and formed two parties, that of Raphael being by far the most numerous. Michael Angelo was too haughty to enter into rivalry himself, but put forward Sebastian del Piombo as a worthy competitor of Raphael. In order to decide the controversy, the Cardinal de Medici commissioned Raphael to paint the Transfiguration, and at the same time commanded Sebastian to paint the Raising of Lazarus - now in the British National Gallery. Michael Angelo, well aware that Sebastian was a far better colorist than designer, furnished him with the cartoon for his picture , and it is said drew some of the pictures, and Raphael, hearing of it, joyfully exclaimed, "Michael Angelo has deemed me worthy to compete with himself, and not with Sebastian." But he did not live to enjoy the triumph of his acknowledged superiority. He died before his great picture was finished, and it was completed by Giulio Romano. While painting it , Raphael was employed on many other works, among them the preparation of the architectural plans for the great Cathedral of St. Peter's. Besides his grand compositions from the Old and New Testament, and his frescoes and

arabesques in the Vatican, he left about one hundred and twenty pieces of the Virgin and Child, all various, only resembling each other in the peculiar types of chaste and maternal loveliness which he has given to the Virgin, and the infantile beauty of the Child. He also painted about eighty portraits. One of the most famous of these, - The Fornarina, has long been supposed to represent a young girl whom he loved, but this appears very doubtful. Besides these he made seventeen architectural designs for sculptures, ornaments, etc. But it is not any single production of his hand, however beautiful, nor his superiority in any particular department of art; it is the number and variety of his creations, the union of inexhaustible fertility of imagination with excellence of every kind - faculties never combined in the same degree in any artist before or since,- which have placed Raphael at the head of his profession, and have rendered him the wonder and delight of all ages.

Raphael was at one time accused of having been a man of dissipated habits. But this has been most conclusively disproved, and we have the satisfaction of knowing that he was as unsullied in character as he was gifted in mind. He was of a most lovable and liberal disposition always ready to assist generously all who needed his aid. He lived in great splendor, and was intimate with most of the celebrated men of his time. The Cardinal Bibbiena offered him his niece, Maria, in marriage, with a dowry of three thousand gold crowns; but she died before the marriage - for which Raphael seems to have had no great inclination. In the prime of his manhood, in the midst of his vast undertakings, the painter was seized with a violent fever, caught, it is said, in superintending some subterranean excavations, and died after an illness of fourteen days on Good Friday (his birthday) April 6, 1520, having

completed his thirty-seventh year. The grief of all classes, and especially that of his friends and pupils, was very great. The pope, when told of his death, broke out into lamentations on his own and the world's loss. The body was laid upon a bed of state, and above it was suspended his glorious Transfiguration. A multitude of all ranks followed his remains to the church of the Pantheon, where they were laid near those of his betrothed bride, in a spot chosen by himself.

"In all the portraits which exist of Raphael," writes a loving admirer, "from infancy to manhood, there is a divine sweetness and repose. The little cherub face of three years old is not more serene and angelic than the same features at thirty. The child, whom father and mother, guardian and step-mother, caressed and idolized in his loving innocence, was the same being whom we see in the prime of manhood, subduing and reigning over all hearts; so that, to borrow the words of a contemporary, 'not only all men, but the very brutes loved him;' the only very distinguished man of whom we read who lived and died without an enemy or a detractor! "

Charlotte F. Grimke.